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Viewing cable 09ATHENS683, GREEK LAW ENFORCEMENT FACES BIG HURDLES IN MEETING TERRORIST

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09ATHENS683	2009-04-28 14:27	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

Appears in these articles:

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [ABLD](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: GREEK LAW ENFORCEMENT FACES BIG HURDLES IN MEETING TERRORIST
CHALLENGE

CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel V. Speckhard, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

1. (C) As domestic terrorist groups and violent anarchist gangs continue the heightened level of activity that they initiated following the December 2008 riots, Greek law enforcement is looking for help. At the request of the Greek Ministry of Interior, Scotland Yard recently conducted an assessment that identified weaknesses ranging from the strategic (the lack of a Greek interagency counterterrorism plan) to the logistical (poor sharing of investigative resources between units) to the tactical (inadequate use of surveillance cameras). Many of these shortcomings can be explained by Greek legislation, which severely constrains law enforcement, and by a political context in which leaders have an ingrained reluctance to support tougher law enforcement. While we have found Greek law enforcement officials to be good partners in many cases, it is likely that their weaknesses in capacity and coordination increase the security threat faced by Embassy Athens and Americans in Greece. End Summary.

Reaching Out, Getting Tough Messages Back

2. (C) As post laid out in ref B in January, Greek law enforcement faces severe constraints in its ability to deal with the security challenges it faces from domestic terrorist organizations, increasingly violent anarchist gangs, and the huge and increasing influx of illegal aliens who use Greece as an entry point into the European Union. In our own work with Greek law enforcement officers on specific cases, we have found them open to cooperation and eager to adopt advanced international practices where they can. There have been some success stories, most notably in the run-up to the 2004 Olympics, when the USG and others supported a significant training program that did increase the professional level of law enforcement. But the riots late last year, which followed the accidental police shooting of a teenage protester and which law enforcement officers were unable (or not permitted) to contain, demonstrated the continued gulf between the size of the threat and the capacity of Greek law enforcement. Since January, the news has not gotten any better. As post has reported, terrorist groups both old and new have struck with increasing regularity, and anarchist-aligned gangs have become bolder in carrying out firebombings, daylight crowbar rampages in posh neighborhoods, arson, and other violence. Banks, other businesses, and government facilities are the most common targets, but the attacks have recently branched out to include a number of churches in Athens and Thessaloniki April 9. Law enforcement agencies, meanwhile, have been subjected to one public embarrassment after another, including leaked documents, prison escapes, and the February 4 shooting of a contract security guard outside the U.S. Ambassador's residence by an apparently deranged police officer.

3. (C) In response to growing concern over the level of violence, Constantinos Bitsios was brought into the position of Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior. Previously the diplomatic advisor to Prime Minister Karamanlis, Bitsios is well-connected both within the government and with the international community, and he appears to have a mandate to improve the conduct of Greek law enforcement. Bitsios has reached out to a number of Embassies for recommendations and assistance. The most prominent response thus far has been from the British, who brought in Scotland Yard experts to conduct an assessment of Greece's counterterrorism posture. The resulting report, shared with Bitsios and separately with us in late March, identifies weaknesses at a variety of levels. It concludes that Greece lacks a "coordinated government CT strategy" and in particular lacks a media campaign to deliver key messages. It notes that Greek legislation places far more constraints on investigations than is typical for European law enforcement agencies, including in the use of technical surveillance, access to financial and communications data, and biometric data. It also identifies the existence of three different departments within the Greek police, who deal

individually with international terrorism, domestic terrorism, and anarchist groups, without a plan for sharing of resources or information, as a key weakness in terms of operational activity.

¶4. (C) In briefing us on the report, British Embassy law enforcement liaison Kevin O'Shea said that although the British wanted to help Greek law enforcement where they could, they did not foresee Scotland Yard launching a long-term project as Greek press reports had suggested. O'Shea said this was partly because of British budgetary constraints, but also because in his view most of the fundamental weaknesses in Greek law enforcement were grounded in legislation and unlikely to change in the short term. Of the areas assessed, O'Shea predicted the British were most likely to end up working with the Greeks on an overall counterterrorism strategy. The British have also stayed in close touch with us, the Dutch, and other countries the Greeks have approached, making practical suggestions such as encouraging the Dutch to look into supporting public prosecutor training.

Lessons from the Past; Implications for the Future

¶5. (SBU) We have a relatively good working relationship with Greek law enforcement officials, and have found them open to new concepts and to working with us on specific cases in which there are U.S. interests. We have provided different kinds of training at different times, although in many cases that training is now getting old. The training before the 2004 Olympics, especially the 1,450 Greek officers trained by DS/ATA from 2002 to 2004, had a significant impact, contributing to a substantial improvement in public views of law enforcement. Even today, despite the ongoing difficulties, most Greeks would admit (even if grudgingly) that today's police force is better than that of a generation or two ago. While we have not conducted police training on that scale since the Olympics, Embassy LEGAT has provided training to nearly 200 police officers and 50 military personnel over the past 18 months, most of them specifically in counterterrorism-related topics. In the last year, DHS/ICE trained 120 Greek police, immigration, and customs officials in the areas of human trafficking, counterfeit document detection, and cyber crime. Since September 2008, DEA has trained about 300 Greek police, Coast Guard, and Special Control Service officials on undercover operations and related topics.

¶6. (C) Nevertheless, Greek law enforcement officials face legal, political, and organizational challenges that limit their ability to disrupt and roll up terrorist organizations. For example, they have made no arrests of members of Revolutionary Struggle (RS), the group that launched the RPG at the Embassy in January 2007, and RS has been one of the leading participants in the latest round of violence. These limitations have a number of consequences, including one of special concern to us: an increased security risk to the Mission. We have not been targeted in recent violence, although some American companies (most notably Citibank) have been. Given the deep-seated anti-Americanism of the Greek far left, and these groups' past targeting of the U.S., the danger that they will turn their sights to us is very real. The current generation of Greek terrorists has thus far managed to avoid any significant arrests; they may believe they can act with impunity. Unless Greek law enforcement is able to break up some of these groups at this stage, we and other potential targets in Greece will face a continuously more skilled and extensive terrorist threat.

¶7. (SBU) As outlined in ref A, post recommends re-starting a DS/ATA program, as was done prior to the 2004 Olympics, to strengthen the capacity of Greek law enforcement bodies to deal with the significant threats they faces and which also threaten U.S. interests. It would begin with an assessment of Greece's counterterrorism needs, and subsequent training would focus on such areas as SWAT, explosive ordnance demolition (EOD), political violence, hostage negotiations, and major case management.